

National Hospice and Palliative Care
Organization



June 14, 2002

Honorable William M. Thomas
Chairman,
Committee on Ways and Means
1136 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), I want to convey our appreciation for your efforts to expand access to hospice care. In particular, we applaud your provision, in the Ways and Means Committee's Medicare proposal, providing Medicare beneficiaries the option of seeking consultative services from hospice programs.

We appreciate your long-standing concern regarding the shrinking length of time Medicare beneficiaries are enrolled in hospice care. As you know, the General Accounting Office (GAO) reported to Congress that nearly one-third of hospice patients had a length of service of one week or less. This is far too short a time period for patients, and their families, to avail themselves of all of the services that hospice has to offer. It is our hope that by allowing Medicare beneficiaries to consult with hospice programs, it will not only improve the quality of their care, but also increase awareness of, and comfort with, the Medicare Hospice Benefit. We are very pleased that you include this provision in your legislation.

Indeed, by increasing access to hospice's unique expertise, you are enhancing this important care option for those who wish to die, with dignity, in the setting of their choice, surrounded by their family. We look forward to continuing to work with you to improve access for Medicare beneficiaries to the expertise of the hospice interdisciplinary team. We will work with you to secure passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Galen Miller, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President